

VZCZCXRO8310
OO RUEHBI RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLM #0720 1371131
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 171131Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6062
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0404
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0111
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 7092
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 5183
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3753
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0969
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3825
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2904
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2191
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7679
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5360
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 0208
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000720

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR S. GROFF, D. TETER, D. NASSIRY AND E. BURKE
TREASURY FOR LESLIE HULL

E.O 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT APPOINTS BROTHER AS MINISTER OF PORTS
AND AVIATION

REF: A) COLOMBO 263 B) COLOMBO 324 C) COLOMBO 394
D) COLOMBO 502 E) COLOMBO 698 F) 06 COLOMBO 2086

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Rajapaksa has appointed his older brother, Chamal, as Minister of Ports and Aviation. The position makes Chamal responsible for oversight of several multi-million dollar ventures that the President has pushed, including an international port and airport in his home district, and Mihin Lanka, the new budget national carrier named after President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The President himself had held the ports and aviation portfolio since dismissing former Minister Mangala Samaraweera in February. By appointing his brother to the post, the President has again acted to maintain his immediate family's tight grip on the most lucrative and powerful ministries. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On 16 May 2007, Chamal Rajapakasa, Minister of Irrigation and Water Management (and brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa), was sworn in as Minister of Ports and Aviation at the President's offices. Chamal will continue to hold the Irrigation and Water Management portfolio. The President had served as the acting Minister of Ports and Aviation after dismissing former Minister Mangala Samaraweera from the position on February 9, ostensibly for breaching party discipline (ref A). Instead, Samaraweera appears to have been sacked because he opposed accumulation of executive power by the President and his brothers (ref B). After his dismissal, Samaraweera publicly stated that he had resisted the President's effort to ram through approvals of a budget airline named after the president and contracts for Chinese companies to build a major new port in the President's home district of Hambantota (ref C and D).

CHAMAL LESS INFLUENTIAL THAN HIS BROTHERS

¶3. (SBU) Chamal is the eldest of President Rajapaksa's seven siblings (Ref E). With Mahinda as President, Basil as the Special Advisor to the President, and Gothabaya as the Secretary of Defense, Chamal is the least influential of the clan. Prior to his current postings, Chamal served as the Minister of Agriculture Development/Plantation Industries.

COMMENT: KEEPING THE PORTS AND AVIATION
MINISTRY UNDER THE RAJAPAKSA CLAN

¶4. (SBU) The Ports and Aviation Ministry is significant to the President's agenda. Various donors and investors have committed over a billion dollars to expand the Colombo sea and air ports and for infrastructure projects in Hambantota. In addition to the Hambantota port project, the President is also pushing development of a new international airport in Weerawila (also near the President's home district). The Hambantota projects have been controversial, because they do not appear to meet real economic demands and because the airport would threaten a vulnerable bird sanctuary (ref F).

¶5. (SBU) Recently, the President seemed eager to regain the popular Samaraweera's support by offering to bring him back into the Cabinet. Samaraweera is reported to have insisted on regaining his original portfolios. The President's appointment of his brother to the Ports and Aviation job both indicates that a rapprochement with Samaraweera is not in the offing and that the President wanted someone in this particular ministry who would not stand in the way of his signature port, airport, and airline projects.

BLAKE